

## Reviews

**Gender and Sexuality in African Literature and Film** edited and introduced by ADA UZOAMAKA AZODO and MAUREEN NGOZI EKE  
Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2007. Pp. 333, US\$34.95 (pbk).  
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African society is evolving along with interpretations of gender and sexuality. While these changes are occurring, African literature and film do not consistently reflect them, because African cultures do not always openly address these issues. Azodo & Eke's *Gender and Sexuality in African Literature and Film* grapples with the issue of gender and sexuality by attempting to 'draw attention to the paucity of current state of knowledge of homoeroticism as an integral part of gender studies in African literature and African cinema' (p. 1). In doing so, this work is an important intervention into the debates on gay rights and same sex marriage.

This volume is well organised and divided into five sections. The first part, 'Social and historical transformations of gender and sexuality', delves into the connections between gender, sex and colonialism. This is an important and interesting section, because this is but one of a multitude of areas where the far-reaching effects of colonialism are felt. The authors explore the question of whether homosexuality was encouraged by social and political conditions brought about by colonialism. Part Two, 'Rumbles of race in gender and sexuality matters', investigates how race and racism relate to gender and sexuality, including the relationship of race and racism to social and sexual injustice. Part Three is labelled 'Contestations, protestations, and representations'. It covers a wide range of topics such as 'performance, corporeal practices, and individual lifestyles, including woman-woman marriage, excision, and incest in father-daughter relationships' (p. 14). One of the readings points out that gender-based, female, same-sex relationships are 'part of the fabric of African traditional culture, and as a pragmatic and practical arrangement for solving many types of social problems, including infertility, adoption, need for a male child, and domestic services, among so many others' (p. 14). Part Four, 'Social constructions of homosexual, lesbian, bisexual, and transvestite identities', explores gay male and female bodies and explores the politics of sexual identity and representation. Finally, Part Five, 'Social constructions of masculine and feminine identities', explores masculinity, femininity and power, while returning to the topic of racism by observing the impact of racial slurs on the black race.

The authors conclude that homosexuality has always existed, despite shallow or non-existent coverage in African literature and film. It issues a call for further scholarship in this area, stating that 'one cannot but look ahead towards more profound work on gender and sexuality' (p. 16). The beauty of this book is that it has larger implications than might be apparent at first glance. While it will prove immensely useful for students and scholars of film and literature, it is also an important piece of the growing body of work creating a broader understanding

of sexuality and human rights in Africa, as the free expression of sexuality is an essential human right.

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**Democracy and the Rise of Women's Movements in Sub-Saharan Africa** by KATHLEEN M. FALLON

Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008. Pp. 168, US\$50.00 (hbk).

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Kathleen M. Fallon provides a fine addition to the renewed interest in exploring women's role in contemporary African politics. In *Democracy and the Rise of Women's Movements in Sub-Saharan Africa* she considers how, now approaching twenty years since the near continent-wide political openings towards democratic reform, we should assess the gains women have made in countries like Ghana, where the process has been relatively stable and has not slid into authoritarian reversal. Fallon's analysis is historical; she is interested in both the pre-colonial and colonial structures and practices shaping the environment for women's entrance into formal politics. She offers an optimistic assessment of how African women have drawn on their unique history of gendered organisation and political practice at the local level to gradually penetrate a political system structured by colonial-era patriarchy and imported masculinist political institutions.

This book specifically addresses women's history and roles in formal politics in Ghana. The case is well situated with examples from other sub-Saharan nations undergoing democratic transition, but it does not cover either the breadth of African experience with these transitions, nor women's experience within them. Most notably absent is analysis of those transitions which have reversed, seriously faltered or have been interrupted by civil strife. Nonetheless Fallon is convincing in her emphasis on how much of sub-Saharan Africa can be understood collectively, distinct in its experiences of democratic transition from regions such as Latin America and Eastern Europe, not least because of the long traditions of women with active political participation at the local level, which have shaped the culture of African women's activism. This is particularly well argued, with an excellent review of how colonialism undermined and distorted sources of women's power in the second chapter of the book.

A central strength of this work is the openness with which Fallon presents her research methods. Her field work in Ghana, carried out over three periods between 1997 and 2004, was thoughtfully planned and conducted, with care to building the trust of the women she interviewed over time, and attention to attitudinal changes corresponding to respondents' growing confidence as the women's movement gained significant ground. The frank approach Fallon takes in her appendix on methods is a fascinating read because of her inclusion of the environments and context of specific interviews. Throughout the book she often inserts herself into the narrative, for example when describing her interview with a self-described 'big man' from the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs about a stalled domestic violence bill, where her questions provoked a tirade